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At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Center held on June 30, Miss Elizabeth Thomas a member of long standing and an able scholar in Egyptian archaeology, was appointed to make a survey of royal tombs of the Theban necropolis under the auspices of the Center. This survey will include a topographical study of such tombs, both within and without the Biban el-Muluk, a discussion of tomb-types, sarcophagi and other significant features. Miss Thomas plans to begin her survey during the coming season. She has very kindly offered to undertake the work at her own expense, as a contribution to the Center.

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The following letters from Dr. John Alden Williams, who held the Fellowship for Islamic studies offered by the Center during the past two seasons, should make interesting summer reading for our members. As previously reported, Dr. Williams will embark during the coming academic year on a teaching career at McGill University in Montreal. He writes that, thanks to the Fellowship he has enjoyed, he has been able to acquire some competence in a field new to him: Islamic art and archaeology. He adds, "Due to the difficulties of obtaining such training in the United States (there is only one University, to my knowledge, where courses in these subjects are offered), the opportunity to work in Egypt has been of great value to me, especially since one of the courses I shall be teaching is in the history of Islamic art. I have been able to build up a fair collection of slides, in color, of the monuments of Egypt and other parts of the Islamic world, as well as to gather other materials for use in my lectures... With the permission of the Center, I was enabled to take advantage of a grant given to me by the Rockefeller Foundation for travel in eastern Islamic areas -- South Arabia, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran -- to study and photograph monuments I had never previously seen."

In order to make up for the time expended in eastern travel, Dr. Williams is remaining in Egypt until the end of the first week in August, where such members as have visited Cairo during the early summer have found him available for advice.

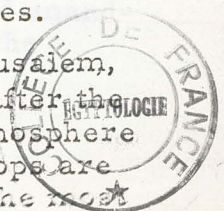
Cairo, May 25, 1959

Dear Members:

Interesting as my trip was, I am glad to be back in Cairo. I have been travelling for around two months, and there comes a time when one must pause to digest.

Although I had planned to go from Iran to Iraq, to see at least the monuments of Samarra and Ctesiphon, this was rendered impossible by the political situation. Virtually no one receives a visa these days, and it takes at least a month to secure so much as a transit visa. I was obliged to fly via Beirut to get to Jerusalem, where I stayed in the American School for Oriental Studies.

Syria and Palestine are particularly beautiful in early May. Jerusalem, high in the Judaeian hills, was still quite cool, and I left it with regret after the three days which were all I could afford to spend there. I found the atmosphere surprisingly free of tensions. There is no longer a curfew, and the shops are well-stocked. Arab Palestine seems still, despite everything, one of the most





friendly of Arab countries. Children, curious and friendly, come up to chat with the visitor, and one hears nothing to offend, whether in Arabic or English, except perhaps around the most wretched of the refugee camps in the Dead Sea Valley, whose inhabitants have little enough reason to be sweet tempered or pro-Western.

I had planned to photograph the Dome of the Rock, built in 691, but found that the present state of that earliest triumph of Islamic architecture does not encourage photography. Due to repairs in progress, only a small part of the area is at present accessible. Many of the marble panels have been removed; even the very ancient mihrab has been taken out of the crypt, and the railing around the Rock is no longer there. The crypt, however, hollowed in the Rock, is more observable than it has been in centuries. It is usually believed that this was the place of the Altar of Sacrifice in the Temple of Solomon, although some modern scholars are inclined to think that it was in the area of the Holy of Holies. It is apparent that at some time in the past it was scarped to give it the present round outline, encircled by the closely fitting golden rail. Generations of Muslim pilgrims have circumambulated it, as they have circumambulated the Ka'aba of Mecca. At the moment a great crane stands near the Dome, from which the lead plates are being removed to be replaced by gilt aluminum; so the Dome will again be a golden one, as it originally was until the gold-leaf was stripped off, most probably to pay for one of the many restorations. Professor Creswell, who knows the Dome as an old and intimate friend, does not conceal that he is apprehensive about the restorations. One can only hope that in 1961, when the work is expected to be finished, the net effect will be a gain and not an irreparable loss to one of the most venerable and beautiful buildings ever made.

It is not easy to be very happy about the Aqsa mosque near by, where restorations have been completed. This mosque dates from the Fatimid ruler al-Zahir, who in 1035 rebuilt the Abassid structure of 780, damaged by an earthquake. Here, glaringly new marbles have replaced the columns; the ancient tie-beams have been removed, and the Fatimid mosaics glare with a feverish modernity. The whole effect tends to be slick and false. One hopes that the present restorations of the Dome of the Rock will have benefitted by the more than two decades which have passed since the repairs to the Aqsa, and that the persons responsible will restore their treasure with all the awe so lovely and holy a building deserves. At any rate, the Muslims are keeping up their holy places in Jerusalem, which is more than can be said of the Christians, whose sanctuaries in that city, due to the wrangling of the sects which are their custodians, sink yearly into more disgusting ugliness. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is filled with beams and scaffolding to keep the crumbling edifice from falling down. It has long since lost any remnant of the graciousness of age, and one can only hope that the day will come when the rotten structure will be so full of shorings that the clergy can no longer get in or out of it, when perhaps something will be done to end the scandal.

Particularly interesting for the visitor to Jerusalem is a trip to Khirbat Mafjar, an Ummayyad palace in the Valley of the Dead Sea near Jericho. A detailed and excellent monograph on this site appeared only last month from the hand of Mr. R. W. Hamilton, former Director of Antiquities in Palestine. This publication not only has enough plates and drawings to satisfy the most demanding, but it is very well written and conveys to the reader something of the



excitement and suspense of the archaeological quest. There is a detailed and interesting chapter on the paintings of this country mansion by Dr. Oleg Grabar.

I was greatly impressed by the ruins, which are among the most elaborate of all the Umayyad palaces. They are roughly contemporary with the remains of Qasr al-Hayr, now in the Damascus Museum (see Newsletter No. 33) and, like the latter, show the impact of Persian and Iraqi techniques of building and ornament during the last decade or so of Umayyad rule and suggest that, even if the Umayyad dynasty had survived, the "Persianization" of Arab-Muslim civilization which took place under the Abbasids would still have been inevitable.

While the outlines of the palace, with its purely ornamental fortifications and its atrium, are rather like those of a Byzantine country house, the use of brick vaulting and sculpture in gypsum plaster, exotic in Palestine and Syria, lands of fine masonry and wooden beams, belongs clearly to the architecture of alluvial Iraq and Persia. The columns of the courtyard bear great crosses, showing that they came from some church or cloister fallen into ruins or deserted. There are two mosques, with large niche-mihrabs, preserved to a height of three feet or so, which were clearly flanked by columns. An underground sirdab, with seats and with running water for cooling the air, offers a refuge from the heat of the Valley. Such sirdabs are features one usually associates with hotter countries than Syria or Palestine, especially Iraq and the region of the Persian Gulf, but here in the Valley of the Dead Sea, a thousand feet below sea level and often scorching, a sirdab must have a welcome refuge.

Most interesting of all are the sumptuous baths, with mosaic floors, swimming pools, heating arrangements, and a large hall. The baths were completed and actually used, while the palace itself was never finished: its terminal date is 746, when an earthquake threw down much of what had been built. Mr. Hamilton points out that the bath, while monumental in scale, had only modest accommodations. With its sculptures of dancing-girls, acrobats, and other frivolities, it was not intended for affairs of state but for princely orgies. The plump slave-girls performing a dance with flowers and the acrobats were features of court life. In the most prominent niche a sovereign figure in royal robes presides over the festivities. Mr. Hamilton demonstrates most convincingly that it could hardly have been the reigning Caliph, Hisham -- an austere and serious man -- who built the palace and its baths, but rather his nephew, the heir-apparent Walid ibn-Yazid, whose dissolute behavior has been immortalized in the *Kitab al-Aghani*, and whose devotion to wine, slave-girls, and musicians was already notorious. The figure in royal robes is almost certainly not his uncle, whom he hated, but a sculptured anticipation of the state he was so impatiently waiting to assume. He came to the throne in 743 (perhaps the year in which he began the palace) and ruled for only a year before he died, having done much to hasten the end of the dynasty. Within two years, his palace was in ruins and within four more, his empire passed to the Abbasids, and his family were hunted refugees.

The stucco sculpture that remains is crude and childish, so far as the execution of the figures is concerned, but the faces are full of animation and character. The floral decoration has movement and vitality. The best of the statues have been placed in the Palestine Museum in Jerusalem. Mr. Hamilton has been able to show, from graffiti found on the walls, that the workmen were



partly local Christians, already writing their names in Arabic as well as in Greek characters, together with some Muslims, and at least one knew Hebrew. He feels that the building and the sculptures were almost certainly works of local craftsmen, freely assimilating ideas from the eastern Muslim Empire and swinging more and more away from the Hellenistic traditions that had informed their work less than a century previously. Here again is evidence of the transformation of the Christian population of the Empire, their adaptation to the new rulers, the new language, and, ultimately, the new religion. The statues, the mosaics, the paintings at Khirbat Mafjar are precious evidence of the life and art of this seminal period of Islamic civilization. The paintings, Dr. Grabar declares, are so close to Abassid art as to suggest that the latter is not a direct development of Sasanian art, as was believed by Herzfeld, but of late Ummayyad art.

Cairo, June 26, 1959

Summer is a quiet time in Cairo, and summer begins halfway through May. Most of the Westerners go to Europe and America, while the Egyptians for whom it is financially possible flee to Lebanon, Syria, or Alexandria for the hot season. Those in essential work have at least a couple of weeks' holiday to spend at the seashore or in shuttered seclusion at home. Museums and many offices and shops are open only in the mornings. Most of my friends and colleagues have departed; Dr. Helen Wall left early this month and Professor Creswell has gone to England, where he will receive the well-deserved gold medal of the Royal Asiatic Society. The staff of the American University is reduced to nothing. This year's unusually busy tourist season is running to an end -- the huge guided tours have all but ceased. However, due to requests from local members, I am continuing the Sunday morning visits to Islamic monuments and will keep them up as long as there is a fair attendance.

I cannot help congratulating myself that I shall be here until August. The weather, after a few stifling days, has settled into Cairo's usual summer pattern -- hot and clear, with bracing nights and bracing mornings. I spent my time writing my lectures for next year, visiting monuments and making photographs at a leisurely pace, which seems nevertheless to cover a lot of ground. The trick is to rise early, work until lunch-time, sleep through the long, drowsy afternoon, then take a cold shower and go out for the early evening, returning to work until late in the cool, breezy night. All in all, the climate is infinitely preferable to that of the Eastern Seaboard of the United States or the Middle West. There is no humidity until the season of the high Nile and very few mosquitoes. One cannot help feeling that the summer rush to get out of Cairo is a great mistake. The only drawback, in fact, to this slowdown of Cairo's always deliberate tempo is that there is almost nothing to report in a Newsletter.

One event of some significance is the arrival yesterday of the Emperor of Abyssinia, Haile Selassie. He was met at the airport by the President and the Cabinet, and will hold talks with the President and see the sights of Egypt. On Sunday, the new patriarch of the Orthodox Copts, Cyril VI, will consecrate the Ethiopian Anba, or Primate, as Patriarch-Catholicos of Abyssinia. This is a new stage in the relationship of the Ethiopian Church with that of Egypt. Through much of its history, there was only one bishop for all of Ethiopia, and he was an Egyptian. In modern times, he has been an Ethiopian, and recently



he has had other Ethiopian suffragans. The granting of the title of Patriarch to the head of the Ethiopian Church is a significant concession on the part of the Coptic Church to the ever growing demand for more autonomy and authority in church affairs on the part of the Ethiopians. Another item of interest in the religious realm is the report that in the future, when referring to the Patriarch of Alexandria, more use will be made of the title "Pope." Anciently the Patriarchs of both Alexandria and Rome were so called, but the title has rarely been heard in the Egyptian church since early times.

There are concurrently so many state visitors in Cairo -- not only the Emperor of Abyssinia but also the Premier of Morocco, Ernesto Guevara and the Cuban State Delegation, the Shaykh of Qatar, and various other Arab official personalities -- that Secretary-General Hammarskjöld may postpone his visit scheduled for the end of this month. While these visits mean a great deal of bustle in government circles, they have very little effect on the city at large, which pursues the even tenor of its summer way.

In the Department of Islamic Antiquities, there is talk of building up a comprehensive photographic archive of the monuments, a record that would be of great value. There is also talk of starting a Department of Research, which would undertake not only publication but also the training of scholars. Both activities, if carried out, would be of considerable advantage to Egyptian and foreign students of Islamic civilization.

The excavations at Fustat, which have hitherto been conducted in a rather desultory fashion under the direction of the Islamic Museum, have been transferred to the Department of Antiquities, and it is said that they will now be prosecuted with vigor and strict scientific method. There are great areas still to be explored. In the past, the finds have been rich; to name only one example, nearly all the splendid Fatimid lustreware in the Islamic Museum comes from Fustat. If the leakage of material found at the site can be stopped and the duplicate objects sold officially, part at least of the cost of excavation might be defrayed.

I am told that other, provincial centers of Islamic civilization are also to be investigated. While Cairo-Fustat was overwhelmingly the most important site of mediaeval Egypt, there were flourishing centers such as Qus, Esna, Tinnis, Idfa, Menshah, Akhmim, and Aswan, none of which has been scientifically explored for Islamic remains. Careful study of these sites would undoubtedly throw light on life and social conditions outside of Cairo from the Fatimid until well into the Turkish period.

As I have said, I plan to leave Cairo early in August to return to the Western Hemisphere and take up my teaching at McGill University. I shall do so with real regret. Cairo is an immensely lovable city, and the two years I have spent here have been not only instructive but extraordinarily pleasant. The Fellows who have been appointed by the Center for next year are to be congratulated warmly; thrown in the midst of so much raw material for their studies, they cannot help but learn and profit, and, for my part, I do not see how they can fail to lose their hearts to this old enchantress of a city.

John Alden Williams



The following letter, somewhat delayed, has just been received from the Egyptological Fellow of the Center during this past season, Dr. Helen Wall. Mrs. Wall's many friends and colleagues among our members will be interested to learn that she was married on June 23 to M. Jean Jacquet, the architect who worked with Professor Rudolf Anthes of the University Museum, Philadelphia, at Mit Rahineh, a village on the site of ancient Memphis.

Cairo, June 1, 1959

Dear Members:

With the arrival of summer weather, the Egyptological tours for members of the Center came to a close, for it really can not be counted as a pleasant recreation to trudge about the desert in a broiling sun. Our last two outings were devoted, the first to Saqqara, where we visited the Serapeum, by special request of the members, and also the tombs of Ptahhotep and Akhethotep, and the second to the upper floor of the Museum, where we avoided the more spectacular displays, such as the objects from the tomb of Tutankhamun, and concentrated on sarcophagi, tomb furniture and model figures, finishing with a cursory inspection of ostraca and papyri.

The Polish expedition, under the direction of Professor Mikhalowski, has finished its third season of excavation at Tell Athrib in the Delta. It will be remembered that the first year's excavation brought to light a mysterious rectangular brick structure measuring 14 x 23.5 meters and containing one large room with two smaller chambers along the shorter side to the West, all filled with layers of fine sand. Professor Mikhalowski, trying to discover the use to which this structure had been put, thought at first that it might have been an elaborate water filter of Ptolemaic or Roman age. Continued excavation in the area during the second season resulted in the discovery of two foundation deposits of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty king, Amasis, respectively under the southwest and northwest corners of the brick enclosure. The southwestern deposit included a model hoe, four copper model baskets, and two fayence plaques with the cartouche of Amasis. The northwestern deposit contained a model brick and eight plaques (three gold, three copper, and two fayence) all bearing the cartouche of the same king. These finds led to the speculation that perhaps the structure was intended as a tomb for Amasis, which had never been used, due to the circumstances attending his death. (Herodotus tells us that Amasis was buried at Sais, his capital.) This winter's work, however, has revealed in the near neighborhood of the brick structure a row of column bases, which suggest that the buildings may have belonged to a temple founded by the king. The paucity of stone remains on the site may be accounted for by the fact that kilns discovered at the Roman level seem to have been lime-kilns into which all available material in the neighborhood probably disappeared at an early period. Next season's efforts will be devoted to clearing the complicated Roman structure that partly covers Amasis' brick enclosure.

Dr. Henry Fischer arrived in Cairo early in May with Mrs. Fischer, on a two-months leave from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. During their stay in Egypt they were able to participate in two excursions organized by Chief Inspector Labib Habashi to out-of-the-way sites in the Delta. The first of these, which I also was able to join, was to Bubastis and Tanis. The latter site is an



immense tell on the northeastern confines of the Delta. Its temple, with remains dating chiefly from the time of Ramses II and the Bubastite kings, is imposing even in its desolation, littered as it is with fragments of colossi and vestiges of approximately sixteen obelisks. Next to the temple lie clustered together the tombs of the kings of the Twenty-second Dynasty, which were discovered intact by their lucky excavator, Professor Pierre Montet. The gold and silver jewelry and vessels and the massive silver coffin that formed part of the treasure in these tombs are now among the wonders of the Cairo Museum. I was unfortunately unable to take part in the second excursion, to Bahbeit el-Hagar, the Iseum of the late period, and to Samanud, the ancient Sebennytos, two important sites of the Central Delta. At the former are to be seen the extensive remains of a Ptolemaic temple; the latter is celebrated as the birthplace of the historian Manetho.

Friends of Dr. Labib Habashi will be delighted to learn that he has been awarded a prize of five hundred Egyptian pounds for his recent publication: Excavations at Tell Basta. The prize is one of fifteen awarded by the Egyptian Government to scholars in various fields, for the encouragement of scientific research. Dr. Habashi's book was adjudged the best work produced in the field of history and archaeology during the year 1958.

With the elaboration of the projects preliminary to the building of the new High Dam, the Antiquities Service has taken cognizance of the fact that the work of recording and excavating Nubian sites is taking much longer than was anticipated and that something must be done to accelerate it, if it is to be completed before the area is flooded. Dr. Sarwat Okasha, the Minister of Culture and National Guidance, of whose department the Service of Antiquities now forms a part, has approached UNESCO requesting an international appeal for funds and technical assistance to carry out the work. One of the first aims of the newly formed committee will be the making of a complete aerial survey of archaeological sites in the Nubian area.

The German expedition, under the direction of Dr. Stock of the German Archaeological Institute in Cairo, which started work at Amada in Nubia late in the season, reports the discovery of a town site and cemetery some three or four kilometers north of the temple. Two occupation levels were distinguished in the ruins, the later Meroitic and the earlier going back to the New Kingdom. Clearance operations in front of the New Kingdom temple showed that the stairway leading to the entrance has been reconstructed at least once, but probably within a short period after the building was completed.

Tourists visiting the temple in front of the Sphinx during the past few weeks were surprised to find a gang of workmen busily drilling holes in the bed-rock of the temple floor. This activity represented the climax of a long campaign waged by Miss Marjory Hansen, amateur archaeologist who became interested in Egypt while in far-off San Francisco. Having put aside a certain sum of money, she decided to come East to put into execution a project which had taken form in her mind: to discover whether or not there existed underground communications in the form of corridors or chambers between the Sphinx and the so-called "Sphinx temple." Against considerable opposition, Miss Hansen finally persuaded the Department of Antiquities to allow soundings to be made within the temple area in the axis of the Sphinx. The soundings, about sixteen in all, were carried



through the rock until the underground water-level was reached, but, alas, no chambers or corridors came to light. The Sphinx retains its secrets!

Helen K. Wall

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It with great regret that we must report the death last month in Arizona of Mr. Ambrose Lansing, one of the earliest members of the Center, who will be sadly missed by his many associates and colleagues. The son of a medical missionary, Mr. Lansing grew up in Egypt and returned there in his early youth as a member of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Expedition. Previous to his retirement, he was head of the Egyptian Department of that institution. He will be long remembered by his friends, not only for his intimate knowledge of Egypt, ancient and modern, but for his gay and charming companionship.